

AG Ferguson, Rep. Lekanoff, Sen. Dhingra introduce legislation creating a MMIWP Cold Case Unit in the Attorney General's Office

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The Cold Case Unit will fulfill a key recommendation from the MMIWP Task Force

OLYMPIA — Attorney General Bob Ferguson partnered with legislators to propose legislation creating a Cold Case Investigations Unit focused on solving cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and people.

[Senate Bill 5137](#), is sponsored by Sen. Manka Dhingra, D- Redmond. Rep. Debra Lekanoff, D-Anacortes, has also introduced a companion bill in the House, [HB 1177](#). Lekanoff and Dhingra both serve on the Washington State Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & People (MMIWP) Task Force, which is facilitated by Ferguson's office.

The Task Force unanimously recommended the creation of the cold case unit in Ferguson's office.

"We must address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and people," Ferguson said. "This bill not only honors the Task Force's recommendation, it's the right thing to do and is long overdue."

... Dhingra, who is chair of the Senate Law & Justice Committee, [said], "Dedicating the resources and expertise necessary to solve the cases we already know about is the best way to bring justice for those we have lost. Funding awareness and training will help to prevent future tragedies."

[Lekanoff noted,] "Only together can we address this threat to our communities, and housing the MMIWP Cold Case Unit within the Office of the Attorney General not only helps ensure needed resources are available, but also sends a message to Washington's first peoples. A message that they are finally being seen and heard, and that Washington state is protecting them."

American Indian and Alaskan Native women and people experience violence at much higher rates than other populations. The National Centers for Disease Control & Prevention reports that homicide is the sixth-leading cause of death for Indigenous women and girls and the third-leading cause of death for Indigenous men. A recent federal study reported that Native American women are murdered at rates 10 times the national average in some jurisdictions.

According to data from the Homicide Investigation Tracking System in the Attorney General's Office, Indigenous victims are 5% of the unresolved cases throughout the state, while making up less than 2% of the population. Due to reporting practices, racial misclassification, data collection and jurisdictional issues, the actual disparity is likely even more significant.

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The bill creates a Cold Case Investigations Unit (CCIU) within the Attorney General's Office for the primary purpose of assisting local and tribal law enforcement agencies to solve cold cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous women and people.

The CCIU will include investigators and a case navigator whose primary function is to work with and maintain regular, consistent communication with families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and people, and to convey information between the investigators and families using culturally appropriate and trauma informed practices.